

# New Seeds of Contemplation – Panel Discussion

Spring/Summer 2024 Quarterly meeting of the North-Central CT ITMS  
Chapter

Wednesday – June 12, 2024

## Evening's flow

- History, Inspiration and Emphasis of this group
- New Seeds of Contemplation and it's place in Thomas Merton's Spiritual Journey.
- Panel questions/discussions
- Other participant's sharing

## The group's history and emphasis

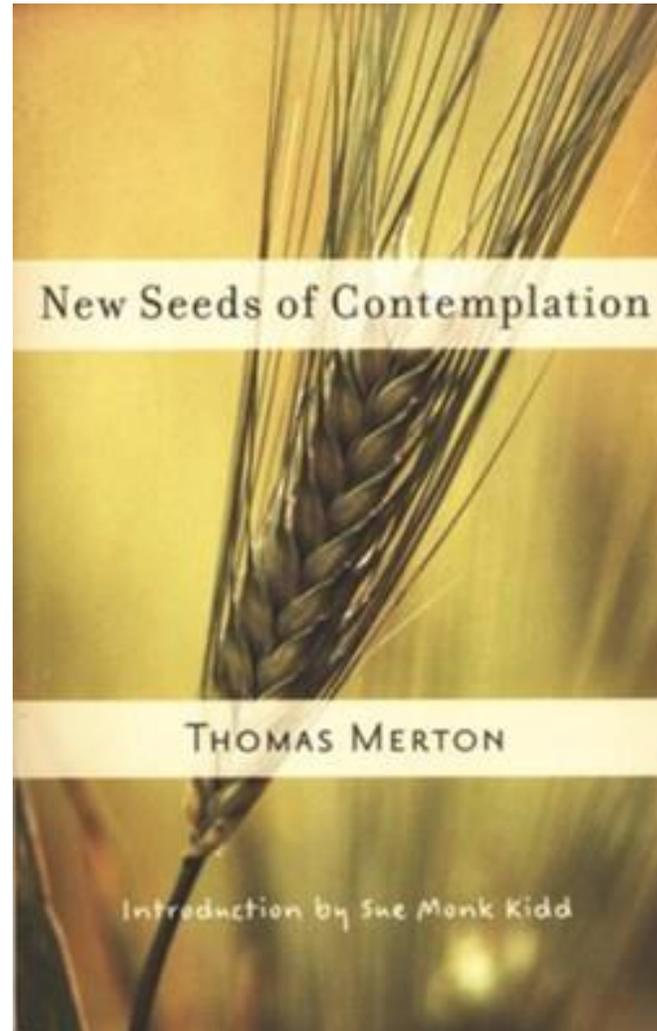
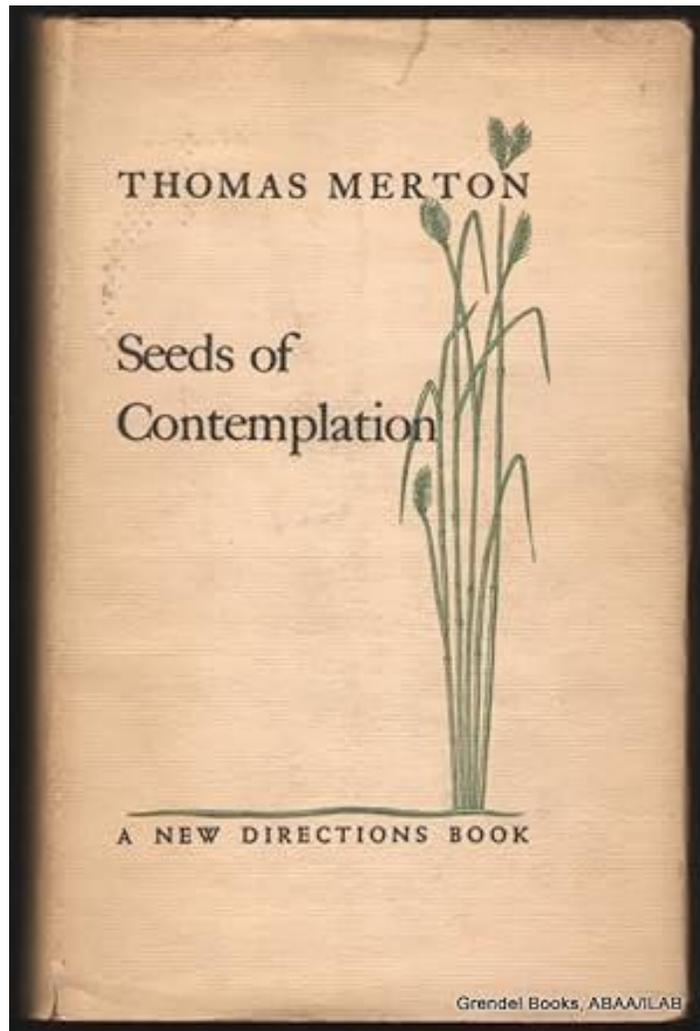
- Began in spring 2020 over Zoom as a group of Contemplative Spiritual seekers gathered during COVID to experience ***bridges to contemplative living with Thomas Merton***
  - Over 3 years we completed the 8-book series.
- Continued to ***New Seeds of Contemplation*** in winter of 2023 and just completed it in spring 2024 – 1 chapter per week
  - Group continues in fall 2024 with Richard Rohr's ***Wisdom Pattern: Order, Disorder, Reorder***
- Depth and Openness of the group made it easy to integrate new folks
- Emphasis was on “living” the material – covered just enough, members encouraged to spend time during the week with the insights we shared and questions on the content



# Thomas Merton's Spiritual Journey

Merton's personal spiritual journey is characterized roughly by the following stages:

1. 1915 – 1938 – Secular Life; seeking and searching for meaning
2. 1938 – 1949 – Conversion to Roman Catholicism, caught up on the fervor of his newly found faith and striving to be a “perfect” monk.
3. 1949 – 1960 – A Focus on Personal Spirituality, adopting a genuine faith and accepting his “imperfections”. Beginning to take a look back at the world. Examining Eastern thought and exploring Zen Buddhism.
4. 1960 – 1968 – Engaged Spirituality, became very involved in Peace and Social Justice issues of the 1960's and deeply interested in Interfaith dialogue.



## **New Seeds of Contemplation provides a unique snapshot on the Merton's Spiritual evolution**

- New Seeds of Contemplation, published in 1962, is an update from the original work, Seeds of Contemplation published in 1949.
- Minor changes were made to the existing text and numerous additions to it. There is a new preface and an author's note. Nine new chapters were added. Most of the chapters that remained have been expanded (one has been divided into three chapters).
- It represents Merton in all 3 phases of his Spiritual life after entering the Monastery.
- Revealing to see the new material as well as what he decided to change and keep the same.

# New Seeds of Contemplation Summary

**New Seeds of Contemplation is a modern spiritual classic and a must-read Thomas Merton book.** It uniquely represents the last 3 stages of Merton's life. ***It has much to say about the contemplative experience but is not a systematic study of that experience.*** Each chapter stands on its own but with a loose thread of connection to the chapters that proceed and follow.

**Donald Grayston**, one of the original reviewers of New Seeds of Contemplation called it an "encheiridion", a traditional term for a handbook that would tell you all you wanted to know about spirituality. "It is," he says, "comprehensive enough to be a spiritual handbook for the serious and intelligent Christian of today." "It can speak directly to the believer who deeply desired both to remain in touch what has been valid in the Christian past and who is also struggling to work out the dimensions of his or her own contemplative vocation in the present world of potential nuclear holocaust." An **unhurried reading** from beginning to end will offer a fairly comprehensive picture of the spirituality of Thomas Merton.

**In William Shannon's** (a Merton and Catholic scholar, a founding member of ITMS and it's first President) **opinion, too much of Seeds of Contemplation was retained.** It would have been a better book if it had been totally rewritten. But Merton was always anxious to get on to something new. He did not have the patience that a thorough revision would have required. It remains nonetheless a modern spiritual classic and one of the books for which Merton will be long remembered.



Any Questions / Comments?

# The Panel

Al  
McGunnigle

Ed Mirek

Caryl Muller

Pam Taylor

Jay Voss



## Discussion Questions

- 1) What struck you personally as some of the most significant revelations on Contemplation or Spirituality that Thomas Merton shared in New Seeds and why?
- 2) What did you realize about Thomas Merton and his Spirituality by going through New Seeds?
- 3) What parts of New Seeds did you find relevant to the times we live in? What felt not so applicable?
- 4) What lingering questions do you have from going through New Seeds that you wish you had an opportunity to ask Thomas Merton about?
- 5) What would you advise anyone who is about to read New Seeds?
- 6) What impact did sharing New Seeds in this way and with a group have on you personally?



Any Questions / Comments?